

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Charlie Bermant, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, December 22, 2020.

There are now 207 cases of COVID-19 in Jefferson County, reporting 22 new cases over the last two weeks. Fifty one people are currently awaiting test results. County Health Officer Dr. Tom Locke told the Commissioners on Monday that the COVID-19 case rates are going down, a very significant contrast to the statewide rate – 2,500 cases a day with an increase of 3 percent over last week.

Locke said Jefferson did not experience a bump in cases due to Thanksgiving, saying that people made some really difficult decisions and hard choices, and restricted their activities. They will need to do this again as the upcoming holiday period holds a higher risk.

The county received 974 doses of the Pfizer vaccine one week ago, of which 467 have been administered. As with the rest of the country, the first wave of people to receive the vaccine are healthcare workers, first responders, and the staff and residents of long-term care facilities. Next up: frontline essential workers, grocery store and prison personnel, bus drivers, teachers, law enforcement, people whose jobs put them into very close contact with the public, as well as those older than 75.

Jefferson Healthcare, so far the only vaccination outlet in the county, has asked people to be patient and not contact the hospital or primary-care providers for status reports. Eligibility status notices when they occur will be available on KPTZ, through the hospital website, its social media, local newspapers, and email and phone calls, in some cases.

And another safety tip: If you've received the vaccine you'll need to continue wearing a mask and social distancing, as you could still be a COVID-19 carrier.

On Monday, the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved an ordinance imposing a 1/10th of 1 percent sales and use tax for affordable housing and supportive services. The tax will go into effect on April 1st, with revenue arriving in the county in June. The county is projected to receive \$350,000 to \$370,000 during the remainder of 2021 and about \$600,000 thereafter depending on the economy. The money could be used for the construction of up to 10 new units per year. The goal is to break the logjam that prevents people from rising up the ladder from transitional and supportive housing into permanent housing, of which there is almost none available here for rent or purchase.

Monday was the last meeting for District 2 commissioner David Sullivan, who is retiring after four terms on the board. He is the longest serving elected county official. That designation is now assumed by Superior Court Clerk Ruth Gordon. Sullivan plans to take a sabbatical of sorts and spend time with his family and four grandchildren before he decides what's next. Before adjourning the meeting on Monday afternoon, County Administrator Philip Morley presented Sullivan with a 15-year employee pin. Sullivan estimated that he's attended about 1,000 county-related meetings during his four terms as commissioner.

Heidi Eisenhour, newly elected to the District 2 seat, is scheduled to take her oath a week from today, December 29.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced that the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress led by our own Representative Derek Kilmer will be extended through the next Congressional session. So far, the committee approved 97 recommendations to make Congress work better for the American people but its mission, according to Kilmer, is just beginning. The approved recommendations include streamlining and reorganizing House Human Resources, providing continuing education for members of congress, modernizing technology, making the House accessible to all Americans and, perhaps its most daunting task, encouraging civility and bipartisanship in Congress.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org.

This is Charlie Bermant. Thank you for listening.